Peacekeeper 3

Having once been a security policeman himself, my new husband did not look kindly upon my bloused fatigue cuffs, holster and beret. Nor did I at first. George and I secured an apartment in Fairfield, CA outside of Travis AFB. He drove to Mather AFB each day, while I reported for duty with the 60th Security Police Squadron. Peacekeeper 3 became my radio call sign, and I timidly took the reins of Delta Flight. Being one of four shift commanders, I was drawn, stiff armed, into the fold. I was the third female shift commander in 60th SPS memory. The first they boasted, was 'driven out'. Yet the disarming Lt Kutzer was still on staff and was proving to be a feisty, capable officer.

I learned from officers and enlisted alike. The biggest mistake any new officer could make would be to ignore the wealth of knowledge and experience available from the First Shirts and Flight Chiefs. A show of personal arrogance or superiority would backfire when you most needed help.

It was 1983 and women were still barred from Air Base Ground Defense (combat). This would later prevent me from joining my security flight when they deployed to Grenada. But for the day-to-day protection of strategic alert aircraft, billions of dollars in military assets, including the well-being of base personnel – perhaps the best man for the job could be a woman.

My experienced brothers in arms, Capt. Lacy, Capt. Brown and MSgt Tuff became unsympathetic allies for me. They did not make my life any easier, however, we eventually learned to make the best of our lot in life. If I was going to survive this male-dominated arena, I needed a couple strong allies to stand by me.

The security police field is a double-edged sword – law enforcement patrolled the base and housing areas, while security was responsible primarily for the flight line and aircraft. Each shift began and ended with a guard mount. I would inspect my troops and pass along information. I also went out of my way to welcome newcomers to the flight. Word came back to me that one new airman felt rather smitten with my attentions.

"*Hey, I think she likes me!*" he confided to his roommate.

"*Naw,*" was the reply, "*she's married, she likes everybody*."

Being an officer requires tact and diplomacy, skills often hard to maintain. I was called to a domestic disturbance involving a very caustic-tongued young woman. My patrolman and Law Enforcement flight chief stood petrified as I was screamed at, cursed, threatened and belittled – point blank, by this seething, bile spitting woman. With all eyes plastered on me, I drew a long, deep breath and replied, "*Well, I can tell you're having a lousy day!"* Of course, the wind went out of her sails after that, and I'm sure my flight chief had second thoughts on my usefulness from then on.

Overall, law enforcement did not see much of me. They were exempt from the daily boredom that was more of a problem for my security troops. Post checks were my primary duty in the early, cold hours of morning. I was not often welcome though, especially by the flight line mobile patrol I found parked behind a hanger one night. I was somewhat concerned as I strolled up and tapped on the foggy truck window. The occupants, startled and wide-eyed, bolted out of the truck, spilling girlie magazines onto the tarmac. Ironically, the one who took the most heat for that little error in judgement, was not the mobile patrol, but the radio security controller who had not warned the men the lieutenant was out on the prowl.

The flight got even with me one night, while conducting post checks around the SAC Alert compound. I was totally surprised with the sudden amount of conversation each of the airman engaged me with, when I stopped to give each a break inside my patrol car. Normally, I was lucky to get a name, rank and duty description from them. At first, I thought it was from the extra cold night, but when the shyest, acne-scarred airman started to tell me about the pets he had growing up, I started to panic. It took almost two hours to finish five post checks! I relayed my concern to the SSgt at the compound gate. In all seriousness he said he would look into it. A few days later I learned there had been a sizeable wager on who could hold up the lieutenant the longest on post checks. The SSgt timing each stop.

The teasing turned to terror later that year, shortly after shift change, on Travis's flight line. The flight crew of a C-5 Galaxy, doing practice touch and go maneuvers, failed to deploy the landing gear, and belly landed in a white-hot shower of sparks and mangled metal. My security flight rallied to the emergency, set up a perimeter, and notified everybody in existence *except* Peacekeeper 3. Where the heck was Peacekeeper 3! In the panic to secure the scene and aid the mortified flight crew out of their multi-million-dollar sled, the security controller couldn't find the shift commander. For all they knew, she could have been *under* the damn aircraft! Where was Peacekeeper 3 during the only major crisis of her short career?

I was off station trying to find the house of an off going flight chief, who had accidentally kept the Motorola 'brick' (radio) needed for my shift. With overwhelming shame and embarrassment, I wish I had been under the damn plane and not on the carpet in the office of the 60th SPS Commander, Major Ainsley.

After the C-5 incident and watching my security flight return unscathed from Grenada, I began to question – no, *my husband* began to question my worth to the security police career field. The idea of his new bride spending the night shifts with over 30 (blankety, blank) guys was becoming too much for him. Valium and PRP (Personnel Reliability Program) ended my year long stay with the men and women of Travis's 60th SPS. Even in my darkest hour, when confiding my dilemma to cranky old brown shoe, Major Ainsley, his sage words and gestures helped me understand why a guy is a guy. As I was about to leave his office, he opened his desk drawer and handed me a small, folded piece of paper. It had come from the locked comment box in the hallway. On it were typed the simple words:

"Thanks for sending D Flight Lt Weil. We think we'll keep her."

Oh hell. The .38 and holster made me look fat anyway, but thanks guys – I needed that.